

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 3, 2014
8:00 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Mike Dunleavy, Vice Chair
Senator Charlie Huggins
Senator Berta Gardner

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bert Stedman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 100

"An Act establishing a grant program to be administered by the Association of Alaska School Boards for the purchase of student equipment and technology services; establishing a grant program for innovative approaches to learning; relating to correspondence study programs and student allotments; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 113

"An Act increasing the stipend for boarding school students; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 139

"An Act increasing the base student allocation used in the formula for state funding of public education; repealing the secondary student competency examination and related requirements; relating to high school course credit earned through assessment; relating to a college and career readiness assessment for secondary students; relating to charter school application appeals and program budgets; relating to residential school applications; increasing the stipend for boarding school students; extending unemployment contributions for the Alaska technical and vocational education program; relating to earning high school credit for completion of vocational education courses offered by institutions receiving technical and

vocational education program funding; relating to education tax credits; making conforming amendments; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 100

SHORT TITLE: EDUCATION GRANTS; CORRS STUDY; ALLOTMENTS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) DUNLEAVY

04/06/13	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/06/13	(S)	EDC
04/10/13	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)
04/10/13	(S)	Heard & Held
04/10/13	(S)	MINUTE(EDC)
02/07/14	(S)	SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE INTRODUCED-REFERRALS
02/07/14	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/03/14	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 113

SHORT TITLE: STIPEND FOR BOARDING SCHOOLS

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) COGHILL

01/22/14	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/14
01/22/14	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/14	(S)	EDC, FIN
03/03/14	(S)	EDC AT 8:00 AM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

JEAN MISCHER, Attorney
Legislative Legal Services
Legislative Affairs Agency
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions related to SB 100.

LON GARRISON, President
Sitka School Board
Sitka, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in favor of SB 100.

SUE HULL, Past-President
Alaska Association of School Boards (AASB)
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in favor of SB 100.

STEWART MCDONALD, Superintendent
Kodiak Island Borough School District
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 100.

JERRY COVEY, Education Consultant
JSC Consulting
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 100 and SB 113.

STEVE NOONKESSER, Technology Director
Southwest Region School District
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 100.

PETER HOEPFNER, President
Cordova School Board
Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 100.

BOB WHICKER, Director
Consortium for Digital Learning
Alaska Association of School Boards (AASB)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions regarding SB 100.

MICHAEL HANLEY, Commissioner
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions related to SB 100 and SB 113.

SENATOR JOHN COGHILL
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 113.

RYNNIEVA MOSS, Staff
Senator John Coghill
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented SB 113 on behalf of the sponsor.

NORMAN ECK, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Northwest Arctic Borough School District

Kotzebue, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 113.

ERIC GEBHART, Superintendent

Nenana School District

Nenana, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 113.

JEANETTE IYA, Member

Bering Strait School Board

Savoonga, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 113.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:00:32 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Huggins, Dunleavy, and Chair Stevens. Senator Gardner arrived shortly thereafter.

SB 100-EDUCATION GRANTS; CORRS STUDY; ALLOTMENTS

[8:01:20 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the first order of business would be SB 100.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY, sponsor of SB 100, introduced the bill. He said it is a bill that encompasses several concepts to help with innovative delivery systems. He read the sponsor statement:

Students come to school from diverse backgrounds with very different learning styles and issues unique to their particular circumstance. As a result, no one approach to education can meet the specific needs of all Alaska's children. Sponsor Substitute for Senate Bill 100 recognizes this challenge and makes several changes to the current correspondence study programs offered by 33 school districts.

Public correspondence/homeschool study programs serve almost 10 percent of the total Alaska student population. This approach to education is one of the fastest growing options in the state. Its individualized learning, low-cost approach appeals to independent learners and policy makers alike. A focus on student proficiency is at the center of SB 100.

Most programs provide a student allotment to purchase educational services or materials to meet the student's Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Under SB 100, a parent may purchase services and materials from a private or religious organization with a student allotment to meet the student's ILP. In addition, each child's allotment may be rolled over to the next school year. The funding received by the school district for each student will go from 80% of the Base Student Allocation (BSA) to 100% of the BSA, currently \$5,680.

Two educational grant programs are established in SB 100. Through one grant program, school districts may combine local funds with grant dollars to purchase technology, along with professional development. With the assistance of this grant program, opportunities for one-on-one learning will increase statewide.

The second grant program recognizes that sometimes an innovative idea needs financial support to get started. Under SB 100, a school district may apply for small, one-time grant funds to help plan a different approach to learning that has promise. Residential schools, charter schools, correspondence schools, virtual schools are just a few of the possibilities in this grant program.

Sponsor Substitute of Senate Bill 100 embraces innovative approaches to learning and encourages school districts to develop such approaches in order to meet the educational needs of a growing diverse population of Alaska public school students.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY read the sectional analysis of the bill:

Section 1. Establishes two new grant programs: (1) a personalized learning opportunity grant program in the Department of Education and Early Development to provide funding to the Alaska Association of School Boards for the purpose of awarding subgrants to school districts to provide technological equipment, support, and training; and (2) an innovative approach to learning grant to provide grants to school districts to encourage innovative approaches to learning.

Section 2. Requires correspondence study programs to include an individual learning plan, as described in the bill, for each student enrolled. Prohibits the Department of Education and Early Development from imposing requirements on a student enrolled in a correspondence study program if the student is proficient or advanced except for requirements described in sec. 2 of the bill. Provides for annual student allotments to be paid to a student's parent or guardian for the purpose of meeting instructional expenses of a correspondence student. Allows for the purchase of materials from a private or religious organization under specified conditions and for a carry-over of an annual allotment for a student from year to year.

Section 3. Increases state funding for correspondence programs from 80 percent of ADM to the full ADM of the program.

Section 4. Provides for an effective date.

8:05:41 AM

SENATOR DUNLEAVY moved to adopt Amendment 1: On page 4, line 17, following "purchase", insert "nonsectarian". He explained that the amendment provides that public funds not be used to purchase religious materials. Schools may use vendors that have a religious background to provide courses to home school correspondence students.

There being no objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

8:07:44 AM

SENATOR GARDNER inquired about Section [2], item (b), "notwithstanding another provision of the law, the department may not impose additional requirements other than the requirements specified under (a) of this section, on a student who is proficient or advanced . . ." She asked what requirements this might be referring to.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked if the question was asking what concerns brought about the need for this provision.

SENATOR GARDNER said yes.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY said education is switching from a Carnegie Unit concept to one of performance. The concept of home school

correspondence is to allow as much freedom and flexibility possible for the parent and Individual Learning Plan (ILP) teacher. He provided an example. He maintained that an ILP should support the outcome desired. The proficiency of the outcome is what is important. He described the difference between an ILP in a charter school and in the public school. He said there is a list of prohibitions for home school correspondence schools. The bill aims to help the programs and the department focus on the outcomes, not the inputs.

SENATOR GARDNER requested to see the list of prohibitions.

8:11:22 AM

CHAIR STEVENS suggested that the bill removes school district and department oversight when it comes to expenditures and the learning plan. The constitution says that this oversight has to be in the hands of the department and the school district.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY did not think it that was true. He maintained that oversight is the district's responsibility and not the department's.

CHAIR STEVENS suggested the legal issues be addressed.

8:12:39 AM

JEAN MISCHEL, Attorney, Legislative Legal Services, Legislative Affairs Agency, Juneau, Alaska, answered questions related to SB 100.

CHAIR STEVENS asked about the constitutionality of SB 100 and if a change in the constitution would be required to remove the responsibility from the department and the district.

MS. MISCHEL questioned which version of the bill he was addressing.

CHAIR STEVENS said it was version I.

MS. MISCHEL said the language on page 4, lines 8 - 11, combined with lines 17 - 21, creates a potential for violating both Article 7, Section 1, and Article 4, Section 1. The difficulty with removing departmental oversight rests with the concern that if the parent who has control, under lines 17 - 21, over purchasing of materials, if they choose to purchase religious or sectarian materials in violation of that provision, there would be very little way of knowing, without some oversight, whether the parent has overstepped the constitutional boundaries.

MS. MISCHEL continued to say what the legislature has done under Article 7 is given the department supervisory oversight over all public schools. This bill is a large change from that structure. With regard to whether or not the school district would continue to have some oversight, there is some ambiguity. The department often provides regulatory direction to school districts in administrative code, as Senator Dunleavy mentioned. Lines 8-11 would restrict the department from adopting those regulations that might provide additional guidance to the districts, which receive their authority both through the legislature and the department. Much of the district authority is restricted by that in the bill because the department no longer has control over the district. There is an ambiguity about whether the school district would, in fact, continue to provide oversight. For example, school districts now must approve textbooks for correspondence students. She said she does not know if the sponsor's intention is to remove the district's oversight over textbook purchases and selections.

8:17:38 AM

SENATOR DUNLEAVY clarified that in the bill, any purchase must be done in line with ILP and the teacher. He explained that vendors are approved by school district boards; parents do not seek purchases outside of the ILP and the teacher who has a selection of vendors. The public school district approves of purchases.

CHAIR STEVENS noted textbooks have to be approved by the district currently.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY agreed and said that does not change under the bill. Vendors need to be approved by the district.

CHAIR STEVENS asked what change the bill makes to the oversight by the department.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY said there is a series of regulations that list things that can and cannot be purchased or done. The state determines the output - proficiency. The bill relies on the teacher, parent, and ILP to determine what the inputs are instead of department regulations.

CHAIR STEVENS summarized that SB 100 removes the department's oversight of financial expenditures and the ILP.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY agreed. He said it places the oversight with the district.

CHAIR STEVENS requested further comments on whether that impacts the constitution as mentioned by legislative legal.

8:22:17 AM

MS. MISCHEL said she does not have a clear enough idea of the legislative intention of removing the department from its legislatively authorized oversight role. The description provided by Senator Dunleavy is the current procedure that the districts are restricted by the regulations that this bill would override. From a constitutional standpoint, the legislature is delegating its constitutional oversight function to a school teacher, a parent, and a district, in a more limited sense, because the regulations that restrict these district expenditures would no longer be in effect. She reiterated that she does not know the legislative intent for doing so.

MS. MISCHEL noted that the Constitutional Convention was filled with conversations about Article 7 and why the last sentence in Article 7, Section 1, is there. It is for the very purpose that teachers and parents and districts, and even the department, would not have to "get into the weeds" of deciding whether it is government entanglement or an Article 1, Section 4 problem. The framers of the state constitution discussed very clearly the desire to spend public money for private school students when it addressed their public health and welfare issues, a legislative and state function.

She explained that other states that lack Article 7 prohibitions have to determine whether there is a neutral affect or whether the magnitude of the benefit, such as under the Sheldon Jackson Case, is so great that it is a direct benefit to the school. She said she does not know whether purchasing BYU courses, currently, would be upheld by the Alaska Supreme Court. Under the Sheldon Jackson precedent, they would have to go through the 3-step test to determine if the effect was neutral, whether the magnitude was great, and whether there was an incentive to purchase private materials.

She said it is an interesting question in this context because when the constitutional conventioners were discussing the issue, they had the opposite question; "can we provide private school students with a public correspondence program." Today's discussion is the opposite of that. She concluded that under the Sheldon Jackson analysis, the benefit may be neutral if there

are other public correspondence materials and courses that a student or parent could choose.

8:26:55 AM

SENATOR DUNLEAVY remarked that the original question is oversight. He emphasized that this bill is a public school issue. The next step is an independent approach under the guidance of a public school teacher governed by an ILP. He said it has nothing to do with going to a private school. The bill would stop the department from regulating schools because the local level should be regulating them. The ultimate performance model is the test for credit. The bill focuses on performance, not on sending kids to private schools. It allows teachers to purchase public materials, not sectarian, and not religious.

CHAIR STEVENS said he needs to understand what the advantage for removing the department from oversight is.

8:30:06 AM

SENATOR GARDNER pointed out that there already is a system where homeschoolers can enroll in a public homeschool system and get access to materials through approved vendors. She asked what else is new in the bill, besides the ILP.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY said most correspondence programs require an ILP and the bill would require them all to have an ILP. The bill would also require that if a child is proficient, no one meddles with proficiency; whatever they are doing is working. For those students who are not proficient, time and resources would be spent to find out why they are not successful. The teacher and parent would amend the ILP to address the lack of proficiency.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if that is not what should be done for all students.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY agreed.

SENATOR GARDNER asked why it is limited to correspondence homeschoolers in the bill.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY replied because SB 100 deals with homeschool correspondence programs.

SENATOR GARDNER suggested input versus output is the same as form over function.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY said it is looking at results.

8:32:54 AM

CHAIR STEVENS requested that Ms. Mischel explain Article 7.

MS. MISCHEL explained that it states that "No money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institutions." She pointed out that one of the regulations that the department sets up for district correspondence programs requires a reporting from the district on who is attending and what the performance is. Without the department looking at that it would be left up to the district to do. The department would not have a role in reviewing the report and making adjustments under SB 100.

8:34:24 AM

LON GARRISON, President, Sitka School Board, Sitka, Alaska, testified in favor of SB 100. He said he especially liked the one-to-one digital initiative program which would have a tremendous impact to the district. He said he is also in support of innovation - options which offer the public various choices of public education. He noted Sitka has a thriving home school program. He concluded that Alaska is unusual and is on the right path for offering various paths to education, including home school programs.

8:38:04 AM

SUE HULL, Past-President, Alaska Association of School Boards (AASB), Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in favor of SB 100. She suggested that adding tools to the choices for students for personal learning is a good idea, as is the one-to-one proposal for technology. The bill would enable large districts like Fairbanks to move forward with access to programs. The district can show that is it currently spending more money now than would be required to adopt a lease program.

She also testified in favor of the second provision in the bill, innovation grants, and the third provision related to correspondence programs. She opined that the change in funding makes it more attractive for districts to participate. She concluded that options are the future.

STEWART MCDONALD, Superintendent, Kodiak Island Borough School District, Kodiak, Alaska, testified in support of SB 100. He shared the profile of the students who would be affected by the bill. Some students live in remote sites and it is expensive to provide them correspondence courses. He said he is in favor of the increase in funding. He also liked the innovation grants. He

shared the suicide rate in his district and maintained that innovative programs help to reduce this rate. He concluded that after 5.5 years of innovative programs, there have been no suicides.

8:45:20 AM

JERRY COVEY, Education Consultant, JSC Consulting, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 100. He predicted that the Governor's proposal and SB 100, or a similar program by AASB, would merge to provide the type of service that covers the state. He spoke about the oversight issue. He said he sees it as mastery of learning versus the Carnegie Unit. The current education system is built around process versus outcome. He expected the oversight issues with the constitution will resolve themselves. He opined that the bill creates an opportunity for school districts to deliver education in the proposed fashion.

SENATOR GARDNER asked about the one-to-one approach.

MR. COVEY said he looks at the approach as a way to work with school districts that puts technology in their hands. It has significant reporting expectations.

SENATOR GARDNER said the Governor, the State School Board, and the sponsor have proposals. She inquired how they differ.

MR. COVEY said he probably was not the best one to answer that question.

8:49:16 AM

STEVE NOONKESSER, Technology Director, Southwest Region School District, Dillingham, Alaska, testified in support of SB 100. He said he would like to address the first provision in the bill. He noted his district was an original member of the Consortium for Digital Learning in 2006. The focus at that time, and currently, is the access to resources - quality learning tools. He said in order to take advantage of the opportunity, the district took several steps, guided by AASB and the grant process. The district had to ensure that the networks, infrastructure, and support were ready to handle the increased loads and demands. They installed new hardware and, most importantly, trained staff. He stressed the importance of a three-legged approach; readiness and support, hardware, and training. He concluded that Section 1 of the bill does that, as well as puts leadership and management on AASB and focuses on tablet technology, which fits in with a district focus on early literacy.

[8:51:37 AM](#)

PETER HOEPFNER, President, Cordova School Board, Cordova, Alaska, testified in support of SB 100. He said technology is the way of the world and the district wants its children to be prepared for the future. He gave an example of a student who was able to keep up with AP courses via technology while away from school for six weeks. Cordova has been a one-to-one district since 2005.

CHAIR STEVENS said he is impressed by Cordova School District.

[8:54:36 AM](#)

BOB WHICKER, Director, Consortium for Digital Learning, Alaska Association of School Boards (AASB), Juneau, Alaska, answered questions regarding SB 100. He called personalized learning opportunity grants the answer for all kids to move forward with learning. He added that the one thing that is different with this bill is that AASB is ready to take this on in Alaska. Other states are not as ready as Alaska is.

SENATOR GARDNER reiterated her question about the differences between the three proposals.

MR. WHICKER replied that he answered this question for the Alaska Society of Technology Educators last week. He described the one-to-one as a program that targets every student. It includes using internet as an option. The Governor's proposal is a demonstration program that moves things forward in distance delivery, which the one-to-one can do also. He said that there are many initiatives out there, but all are pieces. The one-to-one creates the environment for all the rest to move forward.

[8:58:30 AM](#)

MICHAEL HANLEY, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, answered questions related to SB 100. He said the bill is very similar to the Governor's proposal last year, in purpose and intent. The Governor this year chose a more focused, targeted, and modest proposal to build on current strengths. The Digital Teaching Initiative is designed to focus on best practices already in place and provide a critical professional development component through teaching academies. He saw the programs as complementary to each other; however, the Governor's initiative is more focused.

CHAIR STEVENS requested more information about removing the department's role regarding the monitoring of expenditures and ILP's and putting it on the district.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said there are a few items in the bill that need further examination. He quoted the line "notwithstanding another provision of law the department may not impose additional requirements on students" and stated that the department does not monitor individual students; they work with districts and set requirements that districts need to follow. The wording removes perceived barriers from students who are proficient; the department focuses on what is required of districts.

He referred to page 4, line 12, and noted that all students are currently required to have ILP's in correspondence programs. Regulations state how the ILP must be developed - with a certified teacher and parents, and have common, recognized curriculum. He read, "The department or district that provides the correspondence study program may provide an annual student allotment to a parent or a guardian of a student enrolled in the correspondence study program for the purpose of meeting instructional expenses for the student enrolled in the program as provided in this section." He said that part is key because he sees public money for a public purpose for educating students. The sentence above is concerning because it removes restrictions that are in regulation, such as family travel, and family gym memberships. The "notwithstanding" provision removes that restriction, but it still is required to meet instruction expenses for the student, so it would be public money for a public purpose.

CHAIR STEVENS asked the sponsor what his intention is.

[9:04:22 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY said his intention is to focus on the outputs instead of the inputs. He noted a discussion with the commissioner regarding the concern that some of the money may be used for non-educational materials or trips.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY agreed.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY maintained that "the line below" seems to satisfy the commissioner and himself. He said he wants as much flexibility at the district school teacher level to come up with programs and ILP's that meet the individual needs of children. He opined that unnecessary regulations interfere with having

acceptable outputs. The bill personalizes instruction under a public school system.

[9:06:03 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked if the commissioner is comfortable with this component of SB 100.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said yes, because of the lines relating to instructional expenses, which seem to negate several items that are removed from regulation. The department could still monitor instructional expenses for a district.

SENATOR GARDNER inquired if the language "notwithstanding" includes anything else the district might want to do or currently does that would be prohibited under that provision on page 4, line 8.

COMMISSIONER HANLEY said no. He said the department has identified the sections that would be removed. He offered to provide that information to the committee.

CHAIR STEVENS held SB 100 in committee.

SB 113-STIPEND FOR BOARDING SCHOOLS

[9:08:29 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the next order of business would be SB 113.

SENATOR JOHN COGHILL, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, sponsor of SB 113, said he appreciates the committee hearing SB 113.

RYNNIEVA MOSS, Staff, Senator John Coghill, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented SB 113 on behalf of the sponsor. She said SB 113 is a follow up to a similar bill last year that the legislature passed increasing the potential for boarding schools in Alaska and recognizing that it is very valuable for education. Last year SB 47 removed restrictions for the number of boarding homes that can be in place, and expanded the program to include magnet schools for vocational training. Because of that legislation, there are now seven boarding schools instead of three. She said SB 113 asks for the stipend to be increased by 50 percent for boarding schools. She noted a document provided by Galena that shows that increasing the stipend by 50 percent still leaves the school short of actual costs.

SENATOR COGHILL said SB 113 is one avenue of success for students in Alaska. The value to students is the relocation out of bad environments enabling them to be successful in school and in life. Boarding schools provide accountability, intense educational opportunities, and support services. Boarding school students are a small cadre of about 400 students, but the investment in their lives is well worth the effort.

[9:12:35 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said SB 113 and SB 139 contain the same subject matter. He suggested it would be best to move both bills forward.

SENATOR GARDNER commented that she has heard that some students leave unhappy homes for a safer environment, occasionally due to a negotiated arrangement with the Office of Children's Services.

MS. MOSS said she has heard that is true, but due to confidentiality issues, does not have any details.

SENATOR COGNILL added that several students have been able to move out of bad situations with drugs and alcohol.

[9:14:40 AM](#)

MS. MOSS noted that boarding schools have a proven record of success even for high risk students; about a 95 percent success rate. Many go on to college, trades, or the military.

SENATOR GARDNER asked if all boarding schools have school counselors.

MS. MOSS said she did not know.

CHAIR STEVENS noted that SB 113 deals with Sections 9, 12, 13, and 21-32 found in SB 139.

[9:15:58 AM](#)

MIKE HANLEY, Commissioner, Department of Education and Early Development (DEED), Juneau, Alaska, answered questions related to SB 113. He said regarding residential costs, the numbers in SB 113 are identical to those in SB 139. The Governor's bill also requires an open annual application process. The only time a potential school can apply to be a residential school is during an open period. He said he opened the application period last year, which allowed four new schools to come on line.

CHAIR STEVENS opened public testimony.

JERRY COVEY, Educational Consultant, JSC Consulting, Anchorage, Alaska, provided information related to SB 113. He noted the audited expenses of the residential programs document that they are operating at deficit spending. He said the proposed increase in the stipend is justified. He pointed out that residential programs provide vital services to mostly rural students. There are about 300 students statewide, not counting the 100 students at Mt. Edgecumbe.

He said variable length programs are new and came about after last year's open enrollment. These programs provide a truly unique opportunity. They are small and short term. For example, NACTEC in Nome has a 25-bed dormitory, but they deliver services to 400 students throughout the year. Chugach School District has just enlarged their dorm and serves over 260 students. He said the state is getting "tremendous bang for the buck." In Chugach, since 2003, 98 percent of students graduated from high school. The program is called Voyage to Excellence and it accepts all students, many who are in peril of not graduating.

He related that currently, there are three year-long programs - Galena, Nenana, and Lower Kuskokwim School District, AND two variable-length programs - Chugach and NACTEC. There are two new programs coming on line, Northwest Arctic Borough School District and Cook Inlet Tribal Council. There is tremendous interest across the state for residential learning; two school districts are actively planning a program, two more are in the preplanning phase, and 6 - 10 schools that are in the consideration stage. He noted he was representing Citizens for the Educational Advancement of Alaska's Children (CEAAC) and Cook Inlet Tribal Council on this issue.

[9:21:36 AM](#)

NORMAN ECK, Ph.D., Superintendent, Northwest Arctic Borough School District (NWABSD), Kotzebue, Alaska, testified in support of SB 113. He maintained that residential schools are essential; students need alternatives and better choices for their future. He described the NWABSD and said it is the only school district in the state that has a post-secondary residential school, the Alaska Technical Center.

He thanked the legislature for the support for the remodel of the technical center in order to add a magnet school. He said over the last four years, as the district re-instituted career and technical education, the graduation rate went from 49

percent to 64 percent. Students who have taken two or more classes in career pathways have a graduation rate of 83 percent. He listed the four pillars of the magnet school; health care, education, culinary arts, and process technology.

He thanked the legislature for the \$4 million to begin construction of a dorm for students who will attend the magnet school. Even with the increase in the stipend, it is expected that the operation of the dorm will be at a loss for the expected 40 students. He stressed the value of being able to offer students what they need to be successful for the rest of their lives.

9:25:34 AM

ERIC GEBHART, Superintendent, Nenana School District, Nenana, Alaska, testified in support of SB 113.

9:26:53 AM

JEANETTE IYA, Member, Bering Strait School Board, Savoonga, Alaska, testified in support of SB 113. She said the BSA has not been increased in four years, but expenses have increased. She pointed out that the district has increased the graduation rate. She voiced appreciation for the funding for safety and security. She asked the committee to consider an increase in the BSA. She commented that Mt. Edgecumbe School has students that are not in dire situations; some boarding school students do not have problem students.

CHAIR STEVENS announced he would hold SB 113 for further consideration. He noted that SB 139 would be heard at another time.

9:32:04 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the Senate Education Standing Committee at 9:32 a.m.